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**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH RECOGNIZES  
NATIONAL INFANT IMMUNIZATION WEEK**

RICHMOND, Va.—The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) will kick off National Infant Immunization Week April 24 through April 30. The 2005 campaign slogan is “Love them. Protect them. Immunize them. Vaccination: An Act of Love.” Local health departments will sponsor activities throughout the week to spread awareness about immunizations, improve immunization coverage levels, and promote access to health services.

“Vaccination is vital to a child’s well-being and represents a simple and inexpensive way to protect our children from 11 potentially deadly infectious diseases,” said State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, MD, MPH. “This annual observance is a good reminder for parents and caregivers to ensure that their children receive the necessary vaccinations, according to the recommended schedule.”

Thanks to advancements in medical research, immunization is one of the safest and most beneficial public health achievements in history. In the United States and in Virginia, most vaccine-preventable diseases have been reduced by more than 99 percent since the introduction of vaccines, and reported cases of vaccine-preventable diseases are at, or near, all-time record lows.

Vaccines are among modern medicine’s most successful and cost-effective public health tools available for preventing disease. They not only prevent a vaccinated individual from developing a potentially serious disease, but they also help protect the entire community by reducing the spread of infectious agents.

Children require over 80 percent of their vaccinations within the first 24 months of life to protect them against disease, disability, and even death. Significant progress has been made in increasing Virginia’s immunization rates for children younger than two years old. According to the most recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention National Immunization Survey, immunization levels are at an all-time high. In Virginia, nearly 82 percent of children 19 to 35 months of age have received the appropriate immunizations.

“We have made great progress but much remains to be done,” said Jim Farrell, Director of VDH’s Division of Immunization. “More than 20,000 of Virginia’s two-year-olds are still not adequately protected against vaccine-preventable diseases and more than 200 children are born in Virginia each day with the need to begin the vaccination process.”

Parents are strongly urged to make their child’s vaccination a priority because children who are not immunized increase the potential for spreading disease. Immunization protects families and communities.

For more information about the importance of immunizations, log onto the Virginia Department of Health’s Web site at <http://www.vdh.state.va.us/imm/index.asp>.

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